

## Petitions Briefing

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 5 Rhagfyr 2017  
Petitions Committee | 5 December 2017

### Research briefing: Tackle rough sleeping

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Petition number: P-05-790

Petition title: Tackle rough sleeping

Petition topic: We're calling on the Welsh Government to tackle rough sleeping in Wales. A devolved government is a "government closer to the people," all the people!

I recently moved to Wales and I have fallen in love with everything Welsh. But every day my happiness is mixed with immense sadness because I pass so many people sleeping rough in the streets. Their ongoing misery is an affront to my humanity. As an individual I cannot solve their problem on my own but together as a government and people we can make a difference.

The homeless people I pass every day in Wales have indicated that they feel like "forgotten people". They live in a vicious circle which can only be broken if the government sets a clear strategy to get them off the street and into a safe accommodation so they regain their lives. About 2 weeks ago I passed a homeless person and someone commented that individuals sleeping rough want to be homeless. As I was arguing against this logic we passed a homeless man near city road reading a book!

No one chooses to be homeless. People become homeless as a result of certain circumstances and the government has a duty to get people off the street so they can be active citizens who can live with dignity, have access to work opportunities and be able to vote. The Housing Act (Wales) 2014 required all councils in Wales to help anyone at risk of becoming homelessness within 56 days does not solve the problem of individuals who are already homeless and sleeping in the streets. We need to address rough sleeping now!

## Rough sleeping in Wales

The Welsh Government has [defined rough sleepers as](#):

*'People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting in/on or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations or "bashes").'*

Local authorities have carried out a national rough sleeper monitoring exercise in 2015 and 2016 to try to gauge the level of rough sleeping across Wales.

Based on the information gathered by local agencies, health organisations and other community service groups in contact with rough sleepers in the [two weeks from 10–23 October 2016](#), local authorities estimated that **313 persons were sleeping rough** across Wales over this period. Local authorities reported a total of **141 individuals observed sleeping rough** in Wales between 10pm on Thursday, 3 November and 5am on Friday, 4 November 2016. Local authorities also reported that there were **168 emergency bed spaces in Wales of which 40 (24%) were unoccupied** and available on 3 November 2016.

In 2015, based on the information gathered by local agencies, health organisations, and other community service groups in contact with rough sleepers in the [two weeks from 2–15 November 2015](#), local authorities estimated that **240 persons were sleeping rough** across Wales over this period. Local authorities reported a total of **82 individuals observed sleeping rough** in Wales between 11pm on Wednesday, 25 November and 3am on Thursday, 26 November 2015. Local authorities also reported that there were **180 emergency bed spaces across Wales of which 19 bed spaces (11%) were vacant** and available on 25 November.

It should be noted that direct comparisons cannot be made between different rough sleeper exercises due to differences in timing, methodology and coverage. A range of factors can impact on single-night counts of rough sleepers, such as location, timing and weather. As such, the November 2015 and 2016 counts are snapshot estimates, and can only provide a very broad indication of rough sleeping levels on the night of the count.

## Housing (Wales) Act 2014

Under [Section 73 of the Housing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) local authorities have a **duty to help to secure accommodation** for all applicants assessed as homeless for a period of **56 days** (or fewer if they feel reasonable steps to help to secure accommodation have been taken). A local authority helping to secure accommodation does not necessarily have to provide or source the accommodation itself. After the 56 day period, the local authority has a continuing [duty under Section 75](#) to **secure accommodation for those in priority need who have not become homeless intentionally**. There is also an [interim duty under Section 68](#) to **secure accommodation if an authority has reason to believe that an applicant is eligible, homeless and in priority need pending a full assessment of their circumstances**.

According to [figures published by Welsh Government](#), during 2016–17, **9,210 households** were assessed as being threatened with homelessness within 56 days. For **5,718 households (62%)** homelessness was successfully prevented for at least 6 months.

During 2016–17, **10,884 households** were assessed as being homeless and owed a duty to help secure accommodation. Of these, **4,500 households (41%)** were successfully relieved of their homelessness and helped to secure accommodation that was likely to last 6 months.

In the same period, **2,076 households** were assessed to be intentionally homeless and in priority need. Of these, **1,674 (81%) households** were positively discharged through acceptance of settled suitable accommodation.

As of 31 March 2017, **2,013 households** were in temporary accommodation across Wales, with **189 households in bed and breakfast accommodation**.

## Views of the sector

A number of organisations who work with homeless people have raised concerns that the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* does not do enough for those people sleeping rough. The [Wallich charity has stated](#) that the **focus on preventing homelessness 'hasn't fully taken into account' rough sleepers**. Going on to note that 'the focus has been on a preventative agenda which hasn't fully taken into account those that sleep rough and those that live a street-based lifestyle.' While [Shelter Cymru stated](#) that the Welsh Government's homeless strategy is 'proving to be a much better way of dealing with homelessness for our clients', but, **'it's not working so effectively for people who are actually homeless...We're better at preventing homelessness that we used to be but we're not so good at helping people once they have fallen into that hole and once they are actually living on the streets'**.

The [Bevan Foundation notes](#) that the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014* does not require local authorities to find accommodation for people who are not ‘in priority need’ or who are classed as ‘not co-operating’ with the support offered. It goes on to explain that ‘this is legal-speak for a single person without children, or someone who is mentally ill, but can get by with medication, or someone who has refused an offer of a home perhaps because it is too far away.’

## Welsh Government action

In response to the petition, the Minister for Housing and Regeneration, Rebecca Evans, stated that:

‘*Prosperity for All*, our national strategy, sets out our view that it is unacceptable that people are forced to sleep on the streets’...

Our national advisory Rough Sleepers Working Group has been considering the recent rise in rough sleeping and how we can best tackle it.’

The minister’s letter goes on to explain some of the new duties created by the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014*, notes that the Welsh Government has, over three years, provided local authorities with **over £10 million of transitional funding** to fulfil these duties, and states that ‘this legislation provides more help to more people than the previous legislation, and does so in a more constructive and timely manner’.

The Minister’s letter also provides details of funding provided by Welsh Government to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness, including:

- The **£5 million homelessness prevention grant** which supports services, including rough sleeper outreach, day services, night shelters, and youth homelessness prevention;
- An **additional £2.6 million of funding** announced over the summer for projects to further improve services to help people off the street, with a particular focus on tackling rough sleeping and youth homelessness;
- The draft budget for 2018/19 includes an **additional £6m in the Revenue Support Grant for 2018/19 and 2019/20** for local authorities to continue homelessness prevention activity previously supported via transitional funding. This money is in **addition to the £6 million already in the settlement for this year (2017/18)** in recognition of changes to the funding of temporary accommodation management fees, and is intended to build on the progress to date in implementing Part 2 of the *Housing (Wales) Act 2014*; and

- There will be an **increase of £4 million a year in the Homelessness Prevention Grant for the next two years** to support the drive to end homelessness, with specific work to tackle the Welsh Government's priorities, including ending the need for anyone to sleep rough.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information in this briefing is correct at the time of its publication. Readers should be aware that these briefing papers are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.